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C O N F I D E N T I A L PESHAWAR 000379

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: FATA: OFFICIALS CONTEMPLATE EXPANDING KHYBER OPERATION

REF: PESHAWAR 376

CLASSIFIED BY: Lynne M. Tracy, Principal Officer, Peshawar, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

Summary

11. (C) Frontier Corps operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas' (FATA) Khyber agency continued over the weekend, primarily destroying compounds and infrastructure associated with Lashkar-i Islam warlord Mangal Bagh. One suspected Bagh supporter has been killed, and there are no reports of soldier casualties. Mangal Bagh is reportedly in the nearby Tirah Valley. The Frontier Corps is contemplating extending operations into the Tirah Valley as well as conducting a "sweep" operation on the Peshawar-Torkham road. There are concerns that expanding the scope of the current Bara-based operation may lead to retaliatory attacks by militant and criminal groups. Violence is re-emerging in Swat. Baitullah Mehsud announced on June 28 that peace talks had been "suspended."

12. (C) Peshawar remains calm. We assess a conventional frontal assault on Peshawar by militants and/or criminals to be highly unlikely. Their tactics are more insidious, employing threatening night letters, bombing CD shops, and other means of creating an atmosphere of fear. Mangal Bagh and other criminal groups had grown bolder in recent months, particularly when the government failed to muster a strong response in the spring to the violence emanating from Bara. Militant connections of Bagh may have also been encouraged to step up intimidation around Peshawar in the face of the government's weak response. The greater security danger now is fallout from this operation is an increase in targeted violence, directed at Pakistani government institutions. We are maintaining a robust security posture and proceeding prudently in our movements around the city. Post is continuing to monitoring the situation. End Summary.

Khyber Operations Miss Mangal Bagh

13. (C) FATA Secretary for Law and Order Ghulam Qadir told post on June 30 that there has only been one militant casualty in the Khyber operation because Mangal Bagh and most of his "first and second tier" supporters were engaged in clashes in Khyber's Tirah Valley with a rival organization, Ansar-ul Islam. According to Qadir, Bagh's men who were left in Bara were instructed by the warlord "not to resist" the Frontier Corps operations. (Note: Clashes broke out between Bagh's Lashkar-i-Islam (LI) organization and Ansar-ul Islam on June 21 in the Tirah Valley after LI militants attacked an Ansar-ul

Islam stronghold. Approximately 40 people have reportedly been killed in the skirmishes. NWFP Governor Ghani earlier told post that he was "instigating" conflict between rival groups in Khyber agency. End note.)

¶4. (C) Qadir confirmed that Frontier Corps forces had demolished Mangal Bagh's "headquarters," a ten-room complex with an adjacent prison and downplayed that capturing Mangal Bagh was the primary objective. Destroying the buildings would limit Lashkar-i-Islam's capacity to "regroup" and retaliate against Peshawar. (Note: Post has heard no reports of anyone taken into custody from Bagh's group. End Note.) Qadir stated that a curfew had been placed only on Bara's main bazaar because it housed several ammunition shops. Security forces captured a small radio station used by Mangal Bagh to communicate with locals captured. Frontier Corps forces also apprehended four kidnappers who were taken into custody with pre-printed ransom notes.

¶5. (C) Contacts at 11 Corps informed post's Liaison Officer on June 30 that operations in Khyber "are going very well." The 11th Corps officer said that operations were "half-way done" and expected them to continue for approximately two more days. He said that the security situation in Peshawar has not noticeably changed and appraised that things were calm.

Expanded Operations Considered

¶6. (C) While Mangal Bagh's criminal organization is Frontier Corps' primary target, Qadir was doubtful whether the FC would pursue Bagh into Tirah Valley. Qadir said that retaliatory attacks by Bagh or militants in Peshawar or elsewhere in the Northwest Frontier Province would be proportional to the extent that military operations were expanded outside of the Bara area. He implied that at least a tacit understanding had been reached with Lashkar-i-Islam by noting that Mangal Bagh had agreed not to resist the operation in Bara.

¶7. (C) According to Qadir, the Frontier Corps will likely conduct an operation to "sweep and clear" the main highway that runs from Peshawar to the Pakistan/Afghanistan border at Torkham. He attributed this action to a series of recent attacks on and threats to transportation companies carrying supplies to coalition forces in Afghanistan. Finally, Qadir said that an operation against Ansar-ul Islam was also being contemplated and said that doing so would be a sign that the Frontier Corps intended to "really clean up" Khyber agency.

Drug Lord Targeted

¶8. (C) Qadir stated that a June 30 explosion in the Bar Qambarkhel area, located two kilometers south of Bara, was not a missile strike as it is being portrayed in the press but was an "internal detonation." The explosion, which killed at least five people, was likely targeted at local drug lord Munsif Khan who had been the target of at least one prior assassination attempt. According to Qadir, Munsif Khan has loose connections to Baitullah Mehsud and other anti-coalition forces in Pakistan.

Militants "Suspend" Peace Talks

¶9. (SBU) Following the commencement of military operations in Khyber, Baitullah Mehsud announced on June 28 that "Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan is suspending peace talks with the government. This will apply not just to South Waziristan, but all areas, including Swat." While Mehsud did not threaten to resume violence against GOP targets, he said that "if the operations continue, people will see Sindh and Punjab turned into a furnace." Mehsud's top commanders in Bajaur, Mohmand, Darra Adamkhel and Swat endorsed his comments on June 29 and warned that Tehrik-i-Taliban would announce an action plan in a few days if operations were not called off.

¶10. (SBU) Violence has reemerged both in Swat and Frontier Region Tank's Jandola area. On June 29, six people, including

two security personnel, were killed and several others were injured in Swat's Matta area when militants attacked a security patrol with a remote controlled bomb. Militants have burned down approximately 11 girls' schools and a ski resort, and attacked security checkpoints at least three times since June 11. Militants loyal to Baitullah Mehsud attacked the city of Jandola on June 23 and later executed approximately 23 kidnapped tribal elders who belonged to a "peace committee" before security forces entered to reestablish order in the city. (Note: The executed elders belonged to the small Bhattani tribe which has historically been associated with the government to help protect its interests against the larger Mehsud and Wazir tribes. End Note.)

Comment

11. (C) Peshawar remains calm with reports of heavy contingents of paramilitary forces deployed on the outskirts of Peshawar's Hayatabad suburb and surrounding areas. While businesses and government offices are open and functioning normally, local residents are bracing for some measure of retaliatory action by militants.

TRACY